Abraham Lincoln as an Advocate of Preparedness in His Civil War Utterances; an Exponent of Peace and Abhorred Militarism

TEMPERAMENTALLY, Abraham Lincoln was remote from militarism, yet when Fate lined him up against one of the sternest necessities a man could know, he ranged himself—such heart, spacious mind and noble soul—behind one of the greatest military movements in history.

He did not want war, but when it had to be he rose with all the power of his big frame, his clear intellect and his firm purpose, confidently, to push it to a successful issue. Always he endeavored to dissociate Abraham Lincoln the man, about whose abilities he was persistently diffident, from Abraham Lincoln the selected representative of the great American people, who, as such, would bow to none.

Early Campaigning.

In opening the campaign for his election as United States Senator from Illinois, in 1858, Mr. Lincoln made a speech, which he said was carefully prepared, but explained that he was not a master of education, that he had not a fine education and that he was not capable of entering into "a disquisition of dialectics, as I believe you call it."

"If we could first know where we are and whither we are tending we could better judge what to do and how to do it," Mr. Lincoln said in addressing the Convention. "We are now far into the fifth year of a policy which was adopted with the avowed object and confident promise of putting an end to slavery agitation. Under that policy the agitation has not only not ceased but has constantly augmented. In my opinion it will not cease until a crisis has been reached and passed. A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this country cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved and I do not expect the house to fall. It will become all one thing or the other."

He concluded his address with the words:—

"Our cause, then, must be intrusted to, and conducted by, its own undoubted friends—those whose hands are free, whose hearts are in the work—who do care for the result. Two years ago the republicans of the nation mustered over thirteen hundred thousand strong. We did this under the single impulse of resistance to a common danger, with every external circumstance against us. Of strange, discordant and even hostile elements we gathered from the four winds, and formed and fought the battle through, under the constant hot fire of a disciplined, proud and pampered enemy. Did we brave all to falter now, when the same enemy is wavering, dissevered and belligerent? The result is not doubtful. We shall not fail—if we stand firm, we shall not fail. Wise counsels may accelerate or mistakes delay it; but, sooner or later, the victory is sure to come."

In a speech before the Young Men's Republican Club of New York he said:—"Neither let us be slandered from our duty by false accusations against us nor frightened from it by menaces of destruction to the government, nor of dungeons to ourselves. Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it."

On this visit to New York he met a friend and asked him how he had fared since he had left Springfield, Ill. The man replied that he had made and lost a hundred thousand dollars. Mr. Lincoln said that he had his cottage and $3,000. If he became Vice President, as seemed possible, he hoped to have $20,000, which, he asserted, was as much as a man ought to have.

Journey to the Capital.

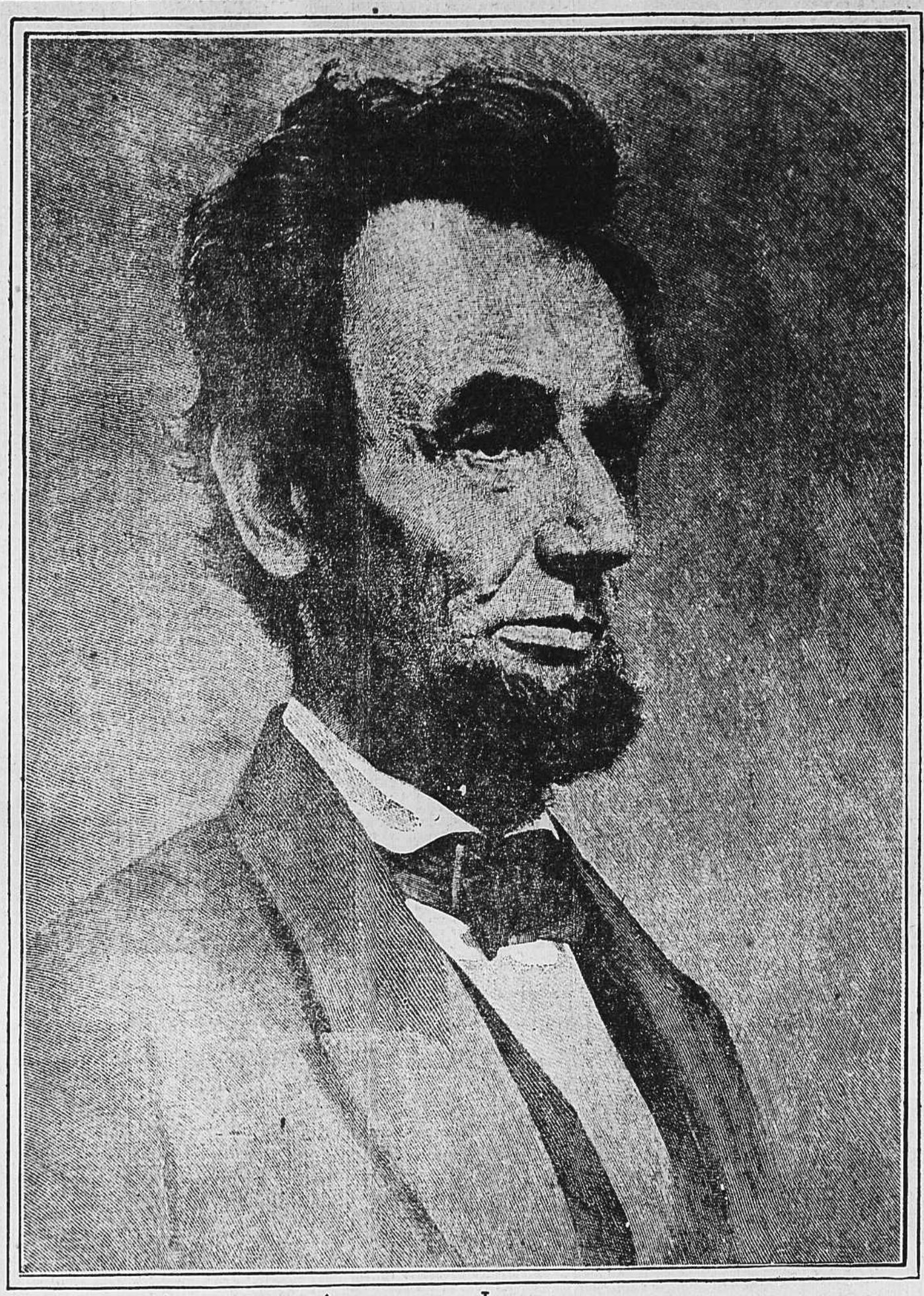
Instead of the Vice Presidency Mr. Lincoln found himself the incumbent of the chair of the Chief Magistracy, deeply sensible of his responsibilities and begging the co-operation of the great American people, whose servant he felt himself to be. This appeal ran through the speeches that he made as he proceeded slowly to the national capital.

"I am deeply sensible of the weight of the responsibility which rests upon me in the position to which the votes of the American people have called me," he acknowledged. "I cannot but know, what you all know, that without a name, perhaps without a reason why I should have a name, there has fallen upon me a task such as did not rest even upon the Father of His Country; and so feeling, I cannot but turn and look for support, without which it will be impossible for me to perform that great task. I turn, then, and look to the great American people and to that God who has never forsaken them.

"I have received from some a degree of credit for having kept silence in regard to the policy of the new administration, and from others deprecation. I still think I was right. In the varying and repeatedly shifting scenes of the present, and without a precedent which could enable me to judge by the past, it has seemed fitting that before speaking upon the difficulties of the country I should have gained a view of the whole field, so as to be sure, after all, at liberty to change and modify the course of policy as future events may make a change necessary."

In another city he said:—"In every short address I have made to the people, in every crowd through which I have passed of late, some allusion has been made to the distracted state of the country. The condition of the country is an extraordinary one and fills the mind of every patriot with anxiety. It is my intention to give this subject all the consideration I possibly can before specially deciding in regard to it, so that, when I do speak, it may be as nearly right as possible. When I do speak I hope I shall say nothing in opposition to the spirit of the constitution, contrary to the integrity of the Union, or which will prove inimical to the liberties of the people or to the peace of the whole country. * * * If the great American people only keep their temper on both sides of the line the trouble will come to an end, and the question that now distracts the country will be settled, as all other difficulties of a like character which have originated in the government have been adjusted."

In response to a speech by Mayor Wood in New York city Lincoln asserted:—"There is nothing that could bring me to consent—willingly to consent—to the destruction of this Union, in which not only the great city of New York but the whole country has acquired its greatness, unless it would be that thing for which the Union was made. I understand that the ship is made for the carrying and preservation of the cargo, and so long as the ship is safe with the cargo it shall not be abandoned. So long as it is possible that the prosperity and liberties of this people can be preserved within this Union it shall be my purpose at all times to preserve it."



ABRAHAM LINCOLN.
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Debt to the Founders.

In Philadelphia he said of Independence Hall, in which he was speaking:—

"I have never had a feeling, politically, that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence. I have often pondered over the dangers which were incurred by the men who assembled here and framed and adopted that Declaration of Independence. I have pondered over the toils that were endured by the officers and soldiers of the army who achieved that independence. I have often inquired of myself what great principle or idea it was that kept this confederacy so long together. It was not the mere matter of the separation of the colonies from the motherland, but that sentiment in the Declaration of independence which gave liberty not alone to the people of this country but, I hope, to the world for all future time. It was that which gave promise that, in due time, the weight would be lifted from the shoulders of all men. Can the country be saved on this basis? If it can I will consider myself one of the happiest men in the world if I can help to save it. If it cannot be saved on that basis it will be truly awful. But if this country cannot be saved without giving up that principle I was about to say I would rather be assassinated on this spot than surrender it. I have said nothing but what I am willing to live by, and, if it be the pleasure of Almighty God, die by."

Referring to the fact that the attack upon Fort Sumter had forced upon the country the distinct issue, "immediate dissolution or blood," Lincoln thus concluded in his message to Congress July 5:—

"And this issue embraces more than the fate of the United States. It presents to the whole family of man the question whether a constitutional republic or democracy (a government of the people by the same people) can or cannot maintain its integrity against its domestic foes. It forces us to ask, 'Is there, in all republics, this inherent and fatal weakness? Must a government of necessity be too strong for the liberties of its own people or too weak to maintain its own existence?'

"So viewing the issue, no choice was left but to call out the war power of the government, and so to resist force employed for its destruction by force employed for its preservation.

"It may be affirmed without extravagance that the free institutions that we enjoy have developed the powers and improved the condition of our whole people beyond any example in the world. So large a force as the government now has on foot was never before known without a soldier in it but who has taken his place there of his own free choice. But more than this, there are many single regiments whose members possess full practical knowledge of all the arts, sciences, professions and whatever else, whether useful or elegant, is known in the world, and there is scarcely one from which there could not be selected a President, a Cabinet, a Congress, and perhaps a court, abundantly competent to administer the government itself.

"As a private citizen the Executive could not have consented that these institutions shall perish, much less could he, in betrayal of so vast and so sacred a trust as these free people have confided to him. He felt that he had no moral right to shrink or even to count the chances of his own life, in what might follow. In full view of his great responsibility he has so far done what he has deemed his duty. You will now, according to your judgment, perform yours."

Thus gently he phrased his ultimatum, which on the battlefield of Gettysburg he was to expound so succinctly and so beautifully that so long as the nation endures it will fall inspiringly upon the ears of succeeding generations.

"Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal," runs the rhythmical declaration. "Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We are met to dedicate a portion of it as the final resting place of those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. * * * It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work that they have thus far so nobly carried on. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us; that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to the cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that the dead shall not have died in vain; that the nation shall, under God, have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Recounting Their Mercies.

Frequently through the trying years of the war Lincoln exhorted the people to give thanks, recounting to them their mercies.

"The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies," he wrote in 1863. "To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added which are of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God." This might have been written of the blessings which have been showered upon this country in this last year of grace, in the midst of so much general affliction.

In Lincoln's day it was "a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to invite and provoke the aggressions of foreign States," yet "peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed and harmony has prevailed everywhere except in the theatre of military conflict. * * * The needful diversion of wealth and strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defence has not arrested the plough, the shuttle or the ship. The axe has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege and the battlefield, and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect a continuance of years with large increase of freedom.

"No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. * * *

"It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and voice, by the whole American people."

In issuing a proclamation for 300,000 volunteers at the close of 1863 the President said:—"I address myself not only to the Governors of the several States but also to the good and loyal people thereof, invoking them to lend their cheerful, willing and effective aid to the measures thus adopted, with a view to reinforce our victorious army now in the field and bring our needful military operations to a prosperous end, thus closing forever the fountains of sedition and civil war."

Carping Critics.

In a letter referring to professed Unionists whose chief activity consisted in carping at the government Lincoln wrote:—"The paralyzer—the dead palsy—of the government in the whole struggle is that this class of men will do nothing for the government, nothing for themselves, except demanding that the government shall not strike its enemies lest they be struck by accident. * * *

"The true remedy does not lie in rounding the rough angles of war but in removing the necessity for war.

"What would you do in my position? Would you drop the war where it is or would you prosecute it in future with elderstalk squirts charged with rosewater? * * *

"I am in no boastful mood. I shall not do more than I can, but I shall do all that I can to save the government, which is my sworn duty as well as my personal inclination. I shall do nothing in malice. What I deal with is too vast for malicious dealing."

Relations of Labor and Capital.

Lincoln held that labor and capital each had its rights, but that labor is prior to and superior to capital. In a letter accepting honorary membership in a workingmen association he said:—

"The strongest bond outside of the family relation should be one uniting all working people of all nations and tongues and kindreds. Nor should this lead to a war upon property or the owners of property. Property is the fruit of labor; property is desirable—is a positive good in the world. That some should be rich shows that others may become rich, and hence is just encouragement to industry and enterprise. Let not him who is houseless pull down the house of another, but let him labor diligently and build one for himself, thus by example assuring that his own shall be safe from violence when built."

After the nomination of Lincoln for a second term he replied to various delegations. To one he said:—"What we want still more than Baltimore conventions or Presidential elections is success under General Grant. I propose that you constantly bear in mind that the support you owe to the brave officers and soldiers in the field is of the very first importance."

Lincoln left his salary in the United States Treasury for eleven months. When the Treasurer pointed out that he was thereby losing a large amount of interest he asked:—"Who is the gainer?" and being told, "The United States," replied, "Let it alone; the country needs it more than I."

Every Man Has a Right to Equality.

Abraham Lincoln asserted not that this is a country in which all men are equal, but that it is one in which "every man has a right to be equal to every other man." Constantly he sought to impress the people with the real point in the great struggle and problem then before the country:—

"There is more involved than is realized. There is involved the question whether your children and my children shall enjoy the privileges we have enjoyed. I beg of you, as citizens of the great Republic, not to let your minds be carried off the great work before us. The struggle is too large for you to be diverted by any small matter.

"When you return to your homes rise up to the height of a generation of men worthy of a free government, and we will carry out the great work we have commenced.

"It is that each of you may have an open field and a fair chance for your industry, enterprise and intelligence; that you all may have equal privileges in the race of life, with all its desirable human aspirations—it is for this that the struggle should be maintained, that we may not lose our birthrights—not only for one, but for two or three years if necessary."

A Presidential election coming in the midst of the war was an additional test, but "we cannot have free government without elections," he observed. "The strife of the election is but human nature applied to the facts of the case. In any future great national trial, compared with the men of this, we will have as weak and as strong, as silly and as wise, as bad and as good. But the election has demonstrated that a people's government can sustain a national election in the midst of a great civil war. It shows how strong and sound we are."

The last paragraph of Lincoln's second inaugural address cannot be too often repeated:—

"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphans, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."